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SUBJECT: NDI AND IRI HELPING ALL PARTIES PREPARE FOR
JORDAN'S ELECTIONS, BUT MEDIA FOCUSES ON ISLAMISTS

¶1. (U) The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) are implementing USAID democracy and governance programs in preparation for municipal elections July 31 and parliamentary elections expected later in 2007. NDI and IRI are training individual candidates and parties, conducting polling and targeting increased, meaningful political participation by women and youth.

¶2. (SBU) In preparation for municipal and national elections, both NGOs have conducted capacity-building programs open to all legal political parties and individual candidates in Jordan. Participation has been extensive. IRI has trained more than 250 aspiring candidates for local office. Their training program includes campaign strategy, use of polling data, platform development, debating techniques and voter identification and targeting. NDI has also provided training focused on party capacity building, and plans to support domestic election observation, youth participation initiatives, and strengthening of parliamentary blocs.

Islamists and NDI

¶4. (SBU) NDI's meeting May 15 with the leader of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) produced a story in the government-owned daily al-Rai that implied the IAF's regular criticism of the USG was inconsistent with its willingness to accept help from USG-funded institutions. NDI's Amman director told Emboffs that NDI agreed to meet IAF Secretary General Zaki Bani Irsheid in his Amman office at the request of the IAF, with the goal of identifying the IAF's training and capacity-building needs. NDI intended to factor this input into the design of its multi-party training programs. She said that at the May 15 meeting, IAF officials expressed interest in participating in an NDI-sponsored study tour this summer.

¶5. (SBU) NDI had had regular contact with the IAF before May 15, though al-Rai's story implied the meeting was a first. NDI's policy in Jordan is to build capacity with all parties in order to avoid the perception of bias. NDI typically invites all political parties to participate in its programs. During the past year, the IAF has occasionally participated in group training and in recent weeks their participation has increased. Interestingly, the IAF has not participated in any IRI training in more than a year, despite being regularly invited. Amman IRI staff speculate this may be because the IAF perceives IRI as being more closely affiliated with the Administration than NDI is.

¶6. (SBU) Al-Rai reported the meeting on May 24, citing unnamed sources and claiming the IAF wanted to keep the meetings secret. Other pro-government media have since picked up the story. The IAF has reacted with claims that news of the private meeting must have been planted with

Al-Rai by Jordanian security services making use of telephone taps.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: While it is not in our interest to help build the capacity of the IAF, with its deep-seated anti-Americanism, it is even less in our interest for our democracy programming to appear to pick and choose among Jordan's legal parties based on their attitudes toward us. IAF participation in fact enhances the credibility of our good governance programs and of the reforms of the Jordanian political process they are designed to support.

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